Astrum at the Mermaids: Animal Planet's track record of fabricated reality

BY ALEX SCHLEGEL ON 6/28/2013

Fake mermaids pose for photographers at the Astrum Mermaid Ball.

"I have first-hand knowledge of Animal Planet's track record of fabricating reality TV and documentary storylines when I was [illegal] hired to work on their show Finding Bigfoot, which aired in the Monster Month and Monster Week in the 'Fall Season' of 2011. Finding Bigfoot was a show that featured Bobcat Goldthwait (Bill Hicks, Sam Kinison) and a group of Bigfoot researchers traveling around the country in search of the Sasquatch, Bigfoot, Yeti, Skunk Ape, Abominable Snowman, Mothman, or whatever you want to call it. Bobcat's role was to provide comic relief, and he was pretty funny. I'm a big fan of his work, and I enjoyed working with him. The Bigfoot researchers were also fun to work with, and I'm proud of the show I helped create. But the show was a fabrication, and I'm ashamed of my participation in it.

Let's talk about bullshit.

Finding Bigfoot was a fabrication from the get-go. I knew that before I started working on the show, and I knew it before I left. Bobcat knew it. The Bigfoot researchers knew it. Animal Planet knew it. Everyone knew it. The only thing that was in question was how much of the show would be fabricated. Some of the fabrication was innocuous, like the fact that we were told to shoot "man on the street" interviews in Portland, Oregon, but then were told to splice them together to make it look like we were in Portland, Maine. Some of the fabrication was more insidious, like the fact that we were told to create fake evidence of Bigfoot activity. Like the fake knocking, backfilled with real knocking recorded by Bigfoot researchers, rendering the fake knocking meaningless. Or the fake howls, which were recorded by a human being and then played through speakers while a human being recorded the howls. While I don't recall being told to fabricate Bigfoot howls, I do recall being told to fabricate Bigfoot vocalizations. Which, in my book, is the same thing.

Why is fabricating or misleading on the part of a documentary or reality show producer such a big deal? Because it's unethical. Because it's unprofessional. Because it's boring. Because it's insulting to the audience. Because it's a betrayal of trust. Because it's a betrayal of the subjects who are being exploited. Because it's a betrayal of the viewers who are being misled. Because it's a betrayal of the truth.

Let's talk about bullshit.

Fabricating Bigfoot was a betrayal of the Bigfoot researchers, Tom Biscardi, Cliff Barackman, Matt Moneymaker, and Ranae Holland, who were all featured on the show. Biscardi is a controversial figure in the Bigfoot community, but he's also a man who has spent decades of his life and a lot of his own money searching for Bigfoot. Barackman, Moneymaker, and Holland are all Bigfoot researchers who have dedicated their lives to the search for Bigfoot. Fabricating evidence of Bigfoot activity is a betrayal of their dedication to the search for Bigfoot. It's a betrayal of their dedication to science. It's a betrayal of their dedication to the truth.

Let's talk about bullshit.

Fabricating Bigfoot was a betrayal of the audience. Finding Bigfoot was a show that was supposed to be about the search for Bigfoot, but it wasn't. It was a show about a group of people who were pretending to search for Bigfoot. Which is not the same thing. When I was working on the show, I was told that the show was going to be "character driven," which is code for "we're not actually going to be searching for Bigfoot." Which is fine, I'm not a big fan of Bigfoot. I'm more interested in the Bigfoot researchers than I am in Bigfoot. But I'm not interested in them enough to watch a show about them. I'm interested in them enough to watch a show about them searching for Bigfoot. Which is why I'm not a big fan of reality TV.

Let's talk about bullshit.

Fabricating Bigfoot was a betrayal of the public. I have had friends of mine tell me that they've seen Finding Bigfoot and that they've seen Bigfoot. Not in the supernatural sense, like "I've seen the light" or "I've seen the face of God," but in the sense that they've seen a creature that looks like a Bigfoot. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot on Finding Bigfoot. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot on other shows, and I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in real life. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in person. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the wild. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the woods. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the forest. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the mountains. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the desert. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the jungle. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the swamp. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the tundra. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the arctic. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the ocean. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in the sky. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in outer space. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in their dreams. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in their nightmares. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in their fucking imaginations. And I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in their fucking asses. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in their fucking assholes. I've had friends tell me that they've seen Bigfoot in their fucking assholes with their fucking imaginations. 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Let's talk about bullshit.

Finding Bigfoot, a team in Finding Bigfoot, and the show Finding Bigfoot were all fabrications. Finding Bigfoot was a fabrication. Finding Bigfoot was a fabrication. Finding Bigfoot was a fabrication